

A  
**Seasonable Discourse,**

Shewing the

*Unreasonableness and Mischeifs*

OF

IMPOSITIONS

In Matters of

**RELIGION,**

Recommended to Serious Consideration.

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By a Learned Pen.

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L O N D O N,

Printed and are to be Sold by *R. Baldwin.* 1687.

# THE NATIONAL ANTHROPOLOGICAL ARCHIVES

1900-1909

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## A SEASONABLE DISCOURSE.

**T**HE Christian Religion, as first Instituted by our Blessed Saviour, was the greatest security to Magistrates by the Obédience which it taught, and was fitted to enjoy no less security under them by a Practice conformable to that Doctrine: For our Saviour himself, not pretending to an Earthly Kingdom, took such care therefore to instruct his Followers in the due Subjection to Governors; that, while they observed his Précepts, they could neither fall under any Jealousy of State as an ambitious and dangerous Party, nor, as Malefactors upon any other account, deserve to suffer under the Publick Severity: So that in this only it could seem pernicious to Government, that Christianity, if rightly exercised upon its own Principles, would render all Magistracy useles. But although he, *who was Lord of all, and to whom all Power was given both in Heaven and in Earth, was nevertheless contented to come in the form of a Servant, and to let the Emperors and Princes of the World alone with the use of their Dominions; he thought it good reason to retain his Religion under his own cognizance, and exempt its Authority from their Jurisdiction. In this alone he was imperious, and did not only practise it himself against the Laws and Customs then received, and in the face of the Magistrate; but continually seasoned and hardened his Disciples in the same confidence and obstinacy. He tells them, They shall be brought before Kings and Governours for his Name, but fear them not, he will be with them, bear them out, and justify it against all Opposition. Nor that he allowed them hereby to violate their Duty to the Publick, by any resistance in defiance of the Magistracy; but he instructed and animated them in their Duty to God, in despite of Suffering.*

In this manner Christianity did at first set out, and accordingly found reception. For although our Blessed Saviour, *having fulfilled all Righteousness, and the time of his Ministry being compleated, did by his Death set the Seal to his Doctrine, and shew the way toward Life and Immortality to such Belivers as imitate his Example: yet did not the Heathen Magistrate take the Government to be concerned in Point of Religion, or upon that account consent to his Execution. Pontious Pilate, then Governour of Judea, though he were a Man unjust and cruel by Nature, and served Tiberius, the most tender,*

jealous and severe in point of State or Prerogative, of all the *Roman* Emperors; though he understood that great multitudes followed him, and that he was grown the Head of a new Sect that was never before heard of in the Nation, yet did not he intermeddle. But they were the Men of Religion, the chief Priests, Scribes and Elders, and the High Priest *Caiphas*. And yet, altho they accused him falsely, That *he taught that Tribute was not to be given to Cæsar, that he was a Fifth Monarch, and made himself a King*, and (as it is usual for some of the Clergy to terrifie the inferiour Magistrates out of their duty to Justice, out of pretence of Loyalty to the Prince) threatned *Pilate*, that if he let that Man go he was not Cæsar's Friend; he understanding that they did it out of Envy, and that the Justice and Innocence of our Saviour was what they could not bear with, would have adventured all their Informing at Court, and first have freed him, and then have exchanged him for *Barrabas*; saying, that *he found no fault in him*: but he was overborn at last by humane weakness, and poorly imagined that by washing his own hands he had expiated himself, and wiped off the Guilt upon those alone who were the occasion. But, as for *Tiberius* himself, the growth of Christianity did never increase his cares of Empire at *Rome*, nor trouble his sleep at *Caprea*: but he both approved of the Doctrine, and threatned the Informers with Death; nor would he have staid there, but attempted, according to the way of their Superstition, upon the intelligence from *Pilate*, to have received *Christ* into the number of their Deities. The Persecution of the Apostles after his Death, and Martyrdom of *Stephen*, hapned not by the interposing of the Civil Magistrate in the Matter of Religion, or any Disturbance occasioned by their Doctrines: but arose from the High Priest and his Emissaries, by suborned Witnesses, stirring up the Rabble in a brutish & riotous manner to execute their cruelty. How would the modern Clergy have taken & represented it, had they lived in the time of *St. John Baptist*, and seen *Jerusalem, Judæa, and all the Region round about Jordan go out to be baptized by him*! Yet that *Herod*, for any thing we read in Scripture, though he wanted not his Instillers, apprehended no Commotion: and had not *Caligula* banished him and his *Herodias* together, might in all appearance have lived without any change of Government. 'Twas she that caused *John's* imprisonment for the conveniency of her Incest. *Herod* indeed feared him, but rather revered him, as a just Man and a holy, observed him, and when he heard him he did many things and heard him gladly. Nor could all her subtilty have taken off his Head, but that *Herod* thought himself under the obligation of a Dance and an Oath, and knew not in that Case they ought both to be dispensed with. But he was exceeding sorry at his death, which few Princes are if Men lived to their jealousy or danger. The killing of *James*, and imprisonment of *Peter* by that *Herod*, was because he saw he pleased the people; when the Priests had once set them on madding: a Complaisance to which the most Innocent may be exposed, but which partake more of Guile then Civility or Wisdom.

But to find out what the disinterested and prudent Men of those days took



to be the wisest and only justifiable way for the Magistrate to proceed in upon Matters of Religion ; I cannot see any thing more pregnant than the concurrent Judgment of three Persons, of so different Characters, and that lived so far asunder, that there can be no danger of their having corrupted one anothers Understanding in favour to Christianity. *Gamaliel*, the Deputy of *Achaia*, and the Town-Clerk of *Ephesus* ; the first a Jewish Doctor, by Sect a Pharisee, one of the Council, and of great Authority with the People, who ( when the chief Priest had cast the Apostles in Prison, and charged them for preaching against the Command he had before laid upon them ) yet gave this advice, confirming it with several fresh Precedents, *Acts 5. That they should take heed to themselves what they intended to do with those Men, and let them alone ; for if this Counsel, saith he, or this Work be of Men, it will come to nought, but if it be of God you cannot overthrow it, lest ye be found fighting with God.* So that his Opinion grounded upon his best experience, was that the otherwise unblameable Sect of Christianity might safely, and ought to be left to stand or fall by God's Providence under a free Toleration of the Magistrate. The Second was *Gallio*, *Acts 18. a Roman*, and Deputy of *Achaia*. The Jews at Corinth hurried *Paul* before his Tribunal, laying the usual Charge against him, *That he persuaded Men to worship God contrary to the Law*, which *Gallio* looked upon as so slight and without his Cognizance, that, altho most Judges are willing to encrease the Jurisdiction of their Courts, *He drove them away*, saving *Paul* the labour of a defence, and told them, *If it were a Master of wrong or wicked lewdness, reason would that he should bear with them ; but if it be a question of Words and Names, and of your Law, look ye to it, I will be Judge of no such Matters :* and when he had so said, *Paul* was released ; but the Greeks that were present took *Barnabas*, and before the Judgment Seat beat *Sosthenes* the chief Ruler of the Synagogue, and Ringleader of the Accusers. His Judgment therefore was that, to punish Christians meerly for their Doctrine & Practice, unless they were Malefactors otherwise, was a thing out of the Magistrates Province, and altogether unreasonable. The third Case was no less remarkable : For one *Demetrius*, that was a Silversmith by Trade, & made Shrines for *Diana*, stirred up all the Freemen of his Company against *Paul*, and indeed he stated the Matter very fairly and honestly, assigning the true Reason of most of these Persecutions : *Ye know that by this Craft we have our Wealth, but that by Paul's Preaching that they be no Gods which are made with hands ; not only our Craft is in danger to be set at nought, but also the Temple of the great Goddess and her Magnificence, whom all Asia and the World worship, should be despised and destroyed.* And it is considerable, that even the Jews, tho of a contrary Religion, yet fomented, as it usually chancs, this difference, and egg'd the *Ephesians* on against the Apostle and his followers. But when they had brought *Alexander*, one of *Paul's* Companions, into the Theatre, the Recorder of *Ephesus* ( more temperate and wise than some would have been in that Office ) would not make an Inquisition upon the matter, nor put *Alexander* upon his trial and defence, but ( altho he himself could not have born that Office without being a great

*Dianist,*

*Dianist*, as he declared too in his discourse) he tells the People, *They had brought those Men which were neither robbers of Churches, nor blasphemers of their Gods,* (for that Judge would not condemn Men by any Inferences or Expositions of old Statutes, which long after was *Julian's* practice, and since imitated); and therefore if *Demetrius* and his Craftsmen had any matter against them, the Law was open, and it should be determined in a lawful Assembly; but that the whole City was in danger to be called in question for that Uproar, there being no cause whereby they might give account of that concourse. And by this he plainly enough signified, that if *Paul* and his Companions had stoln the Church Plate, they might well be Indicted; but that *Demetrius* had no more reason in Law against them, than a Chandler might have had, if by *Paul's* preaching Wax Tapers as well as Silver Candlesticks had grown out of fashion. That it is matter of Right and Wrong, betwixt Man and Man; that the Justice of Government looks too: but that, while Christianity was according to its own Principle carried on quietly, it might so fall that the disturbers of it were guilty of a Riot, and their great City of *Ephesus* deserved to be fined for it. And taking this to have been so, he dismiss the Assembly, *Acts* 19.

After these Testimonies which I have collected out of the History of the *Acts*, as of greatest Authority, I shall only add one or two more out of the same Book, wherein *Paul* likewise was concerned before Heathen Magistrates of greater eninance, *Acts* 23. *Ananias* the High Priest (these always were the Men) having countenanced and instigated the *Jews* to a Conspiracy, in which *Paul's* life was endangered and aimed at; *Lyfias* the chief Captain of *Jerusalem* interposes and sends him away to *Felix* then Governor of *Judea*; signifying by Letter, That he had been accused only of Questions of their Law, but he found nothing to be laid to his Charge worthy of Death or of Bonds; whereof *Felix* also, tho the High Priest was so zealous in the prosecution, that he took a Journey on purpose, and had instructed an exquisite Orator *Tertullus* to harangue *Paul* out of his Life, as a pestilent Fellow, a mover of Sedition, and a Ring-leader of the Sect of the Nazarenes, not omitting even to charge *Lyfias* for rescuing him by great violence from being murdered by them, was so well satisfied of the contrary, upon full hearing, that he gave him his liberty, and a Centurion for his guard, with command that none of his Acquaintance should be debarred from coming and ministring to him. But being indeed to leave his Government afterwards, left him in Prison, partly to shew the *Jews* and their High Priest another piece of complaisant policy, which, 'tis possible they paid well for, seeing the other Reason was, because tho he had sent for *Paul* the oftner, and communed with him, in hopes that he would have given him Money to be discharged; there came nothing of it. Which was so base a thing in so great a Minister, that the meanest Justice of the Peace in England would scarce have the face to do so upon the like occasion. But his Successor *Festus*, having called *Agrippa* and *Bernice* to hear the Cause, they all three were of opinion, that it was all on the *Jews* side calumny and impertinence, but that *Paul* had done nothing worthy of Death or of Bonds, and might have been  
set

set free, but that having appealed to Cæsar, he must be transmitted to him in safe Custody. Such was the sence of those upon whom the Emperors then relied for the Government and security of their Provinces : and so gross were their Heathen understandings, that they could not yet comprehend how Quietness was Sedition, or the innocence of the Christian Worship could be subject to Forfeiture or Penalty. Nay, when *Paul* appeared even before *Nero* himself, and had none to stand by him, but all forsook him : he was by that Emperor acquitted, and permitted a long time to follow the work of his Ministry. 'Tis true, that afterwards this *Nero* had the honour to be the first of the Roman Emperors that persecuted Christianity ; whence it is that *Terrullian* in his *Apologetick* saith ; *We glory in having such a one the first beginner and Author of our Punishment, for there is none that hath read of him, but must understand some great good to have been in that Doctrine, otherwise Nero would not have condemned it.*

And thenceforward Christianity for about three hundred Years lay subject to Persecution. For the *Gentile* Priests could not but observe a great decay in their Parishes, a neglect of their Sacrifices, and diminution of their Profit by the daily and visible increase of that Religion. And God in his wise Providence had so ordered, that, as the *Jews* already, so the *Heathens* now having filled up their measure with iniquity, *Sprinkling the Blood of his Saints among their Sacrifices*, and the Christians having in a severe Apprentihsip of so many Ages learned the Trade of Suffering, they should at last be their own Masters and admitted to their Freedom. Neither yet, even in those times when they lay exposed to Persecution, were they without some Intervals and catching seasons of Tranquillity, wherein the Churches had leisure to reap considerable advantage, and the Clergy too might have been inured, as they had been Exemplary under Affliction, so to bear themselves like Christians when they should arrive at a full prosperity. For as oft as there came a just *Heathen* Emperor and a lover of mankind, that either himself observed, or understood by the Governours of his Provinces, the innocence of their Religion and Practices, their readiness to pay Tribute, their Prayers for his Government and Person, their faithful Service in his Wars, but their Christian valour and contumacy to Death, under the most exquisite Torments, for their holy Profession ; he forthwith relented, he rebated the Sword of the Executioner, and could not find in his heart or in his power to exercise it against the exercise of that Religion. It being demonstrable that a Religion instituted upon Justice betwixt Man and Man ; love to one another, yea even their Enemies, Obedience to the Magistrate in all Humane and Moral Matters, and in Divine Worship upon a constant exercise thereof, and as constant Suffering in that Cause, without any pretence or latitude for resistance, cannot, so long as it is true to it self in these things, fall within the Magistrate's Jurisdiction.

But as it first was planted without the Magistrates hand, and the more they plucked at it, so much the more still it flourished, so it will be to the end of the world, and whensoever Governors have a mind to try for it, it will by the same means and method sooner or later spoil them, but if they have a mind to pull  
up

up that Mandrake, it were advisable for them not to do it themselves, but to chuse out a Dog for the Imployment. I confess whensoever a Christian transgresses these bounds once, he is impoundable, or like a Waif and Stray whom Christ knows not, he falls to the Lord of the Mannor. But otherwise he cannot suffer, he is invulnerable by the sword of Justice : only a Man may swear and damn himself to kill the first honest Man he meets, which hath been and is the case of all true Christians worshipping God under the power and violence of their Persecutors.

But the Truth is, that even in those times which some Men now, as oft as it is for their advantage, do consecrate under the name of Primitive, the Christians were become guilty of their own punishment, & had it not been, as is most usual, that the more Sincere Professors suffered promiscuously for the Sins and Crimes of those that were Carnal and Hypocrites, their Persecutors may be looked upon as having been the due Administrators of God's Justice. For (not to go deeper) if we consider but that which is reckoned the Tenth Persecution under *Dioclesian*, so incorrigible were they after nine preceding, what other could be expected when, as *Eusebius* l. 3. c. 1. sadly laments, having related how before that the Christians lived in great trust and reputation in Court, the Bishops of each Church were beloved, esteemed and revered by all mankind, and by the Presidents of the Provinces, the Meetings in all the Cities were so many and numerous, that it was necessary and allowed them to erect in every one spacious and godly Churches ; all things went on prosperously with them, and to such an height, that no envious Man could disturb them, no Devil could hurt them, as long as walking yet worthy of those Mercies they were under the Almighty's care and Protection : after that our Affairs by that too much Liberty, degenerated into Luxury and Laziness, and some persecuted others with Hatred and Contumely, and almost all of us wounded our selves with the Weapons of the Tongue in ill Language, when Bishops set upon Bishops, and the People that belonged to one of them, stirred Sedition against the People of another ; then horrible Hypocrisie and Dissimulation sprung up to the utmost extremity of Malice, and the Judgment of God, while yet there was liberty to meet in Congregations, did sensibly and by steps begin to visit us, the Persecution at first discharging it self upon our Brethren that were in the Army. But we having no feeling of the Hand of God, not endeavouring to make our Peace with him, and living as if we believed that God did neither take notice of our Transgressions, nor would visit us for them, we heaped up Iniquity upon Iniquity. And those which seemed to be our Pastors, kicking under-foot the Rules of Piety, were inflamed among themselves with mutual Contention, and while they minded nothing else but to exaggerate their Quarrels, Threats, Emulation, Hatred and Enmities, and earnestly each of them pursued his particular Ambition in a Tyrannical manner, then indeed the Lord, then I say, according to the Voice of the Prophet *Jeremy*, he covered the Dangheer of *Sion* with a cloud in his anger, and cast down from Heaven to Earth the beauty of *Israel*, and remembered not his footstool in the day of his Anger. And so the pious Historian pathetically goes on, and deplores



plots the Calamities that ensued; to the loss of all that Stock of Reputation, Advantage, Liberty and Safety which Christian people had by true Piety, and adhering strictly to the Rules of their Profession formerly acquired & enjoyed, but had now forfeited, and smartly and deservedly suffered under *Dioclesian's* persecution. And it was a severe one, the longest too that ever happened, ten Years from his beginning of it, and continued by others: by which time one might have thought the Church would have been sufficiently winnowed, and nothing left but the pure Wheat, whereas it proved quite contrary, and the holiest and most constant of the Christians being blown away by Martyrdom, it seem'd by the succeeding times, as if nothing but the Chaff and the Tares had remained. But there was yet such a Seed left, and notwithstanding the defection of many, so internal a virtue in the Religion itself, that *Dioclesian* could no longer stand against it, and tired out in two Years time, was glad to betake himself from rooting out Christianity, to gardening, and to sow Pot-herbs at *Salona*. And he with his Partner *Maximinian* resigned the Empire to *Galerius* and *Constantine*, the excellent Father of a more glorious and Christian Son, *Constantine* the Great, who in due season succeeded him, and by a chain of God's extraordinary providence, seemed to have been let down from Heaven to be the Emperor of the whole World, and as I may say, the Universal Apostle of Christianity. In a word, as I say, to begin on new roads, now will

It is unexpressible the Vertue of that Prince, his Care, his Indulgence, his Liberality, his own Example, every thing that could possibly tend to the promotion and encouragement of true Religion and Piety. And in order to that he thought he could not do better, neither indeed could he, then to show a peculiar respect to the Clergy and Bishops, providing largely for their subsistence, had they too on their part behaved themselves worthy of their High Calling, and known to make right use of the advantages of his Bounty to the same ends that they were by him intended. For if the Apostle *1 Tim. 5. 17.* requires that an Elder, provided he rule well, be accounted worthy of Double Honour, especially those that labour in the Word and Doctrine, it excludes not a Decuple or any further proportion, and indeed there cannot too high a value be set upon such a Person: and God forbid too that any measure of wealth should render a Clergy-man uncanonical. But alas! Bishops were already grown another Name and Thing, than at the Apostles Institution; and had so altered the property, that *Paul* would have had much difficulty by all the marks in the *1 Tim. 3.* to have known them. They were ill enough under Persecution, many of them, but that long and sharp Winter under *Dioclesian*, being succeeded by so warm a Summer under *Constantine*, produced a Pestilence, which as an Infection that seizes sometimes only one sort of Cattel, diffused itself most remarkably throrow the whole body of the Clergy. From his reign the most sober Historians date that New Disease which was so generally propagated then, and ever since transmitted to some of their Successors, that it hath given reason to enquire whether it only happened to those Men as it might to others, or were the inheritance to the very Function. It shew'd it self first in Ambition,



bition, then in Contention; next in Imposition, and after these Symptoms broke out at last like a Plague-Sore in open Persecution. They the Bishops who began to vouch themselves the Successors of *Christ*, or at least of his Apostles, yet pretended to be Heirs and Executors of the *Jewish* High Priests, and the Heathen Tyrants, and were ready to prove the Will. The Ignorant *Jews* and Infidels understood not how to Persecute, had no Commission to meddle with Religion, but the Bishops had studied the Scriptures, knew better things, and the same, which was Cruelty and Tyranny in the Heathens, if done by a Christian and Ecclesiastical hand, was allowed to be Church-government, and the care of a Diocess. But that I may not seem to speak without book, or out-run the History, I shall return to proceed by those degrees I newly mention'd, whereby the Christian Religion was usurped upon, and those things became their crime which were their duties.

The first was the Ambition of the Bishops, which had even before this, taken its rise, when in the intervals of the former Persecutions the Piety of the Christians had laid out ample provisions for the Church; but when *Constantine* not only restored those which had been all confiscate under *Dioclesian*, but was every day adding some new Possession, Privilege, or Honour, a Bishoprick became very desirable, and was not only a *Good Work*, but a good Thing, especially when there was no danger of paying as it was usual, formerly their First-fruits to the Emperor by Martyrdom. The Arts by which Ambition climes, are Calumny, Cruelty, Bribery, Adulation, all applied in their proper places and seasons; and when the Man hath attained his end, he ordinarily shows himself then in his colours, in Pride, Opiniastry, Contention, and all other requisite or incident ill Qualities. And if the Clergy of those times had some more dextrous and innocent way than this of managing their Ambition, it is to be lamented *inter Artes Deperditas*, or lies enviously hid by some musty Book-worm in his private Library. But so much I find, that both before, and then, and after, they cast such Crimes at one another, that a Man would scarce think he were reading an History of Bishops, but a Legend of Devils: and each took such care to blacken his adversary, that he regarded not how he smutted himself thereby, and his own Order, to the laughter or horror of the By-standers. And one thing I remark particularly, that as *Son of a Whore* is the modern Word of Reproach among the Laity, of the same use then among the Clergy was *Heretick*. There were indeed Hereticks as well as there are Bastards, and perhaps it was not their fault, (neither of 'em could help it) but the Mothers or the Fathers; but they made so many Hereticks in those days, that 'tis hard to think they really believ'd them so, but adventur'd the Name only to pick a Quarrel. And one thing that makes it very suspicious, is, that in Ecclesiastical History, the Ringleader of any Heresy is for the most part accused of having a mind to be a Bishop, though it was not the way to come to it. As there was the damnable Heresie of the *Novatians*, against which *Constantine*, notwithstanding his Declaration of general Indulgence at his coming in, was shortly after so incensed, that he published a most severe Proclamation against

gainst them; *Cognoscite jam per legem hanc qua à me sancta est, O Novatiani, &c.* prohibiting all their Meetings, not only in publick, but in their own private Houses; and that all such Places where they assembled for their Worship, should be raised to the ground without delay or controversy, &c. *Euf. l. 3. c. 6. de vita Constantini.* Now the Story the Bishops tell of *Novatus* the Author of that Sect, *Euseb. 6. l. 6. c. 42.* is in the words of *Cornelius* the Bp of Rome, the very first line; But that you may know that this brave *Novatus* did even before that affect to be a Bishop, (a great Crime in him) that he might conceal that petulant Ambition, he for a better cover to his Arrogance, had got some Confessors into his Society, &c. and goes on calling him all to nought; but then (saith he) he came with two Reprobates of his own Heresy into a little, the very least, Shire of Italy; and by their means seduced three most simple high-shoon Bishops, wheedling them that they must with all speed go to Rome, and there meeting with other Bishops, all Matters should be reconciled. And when he had got thither these three silly Fellows, as I said, that were not aware of his cunning, he had prepared a company of Rogues, like himself, that treated them in a private Room very freely; and having thruck'd their bellies and heads full with meat and drink, compell'd the poor drunken Bishops, by an imaginary and vain Imposition of Hands, to make *Novatus* also a Bishop. Might not one of the same Order now better have conceal'd these things, had they been true? but such was the discretion. Then he tells, that one of the three returned soon after, repenting it seems next morning, and so he receiv'd him again into the Church, unto the Laick Communion. But for the other two, he had sent Successors into their places. And yet after all this ado, and the whetting of *Constantine*, contrary to his own Nature, and his own Declarations against the *Novatians*, I cannot find their Heresy to have been other, than that they were the Puritans of those times, and a sort of Non-conformists, that could have subscribed to the Six and thirty Articles, but differed only in those of Discipline: and upon some Enormities therein separated, and (which will always be sufficient to qualify an Heretick) they instituted Bishops of their own in most places. And yet afterwards, in the time of the best *Homoousian* Emperors, a sober and strictly Religious People did so constantly adhere to them, that the Bishops of the Church too found meet to give them fair quarter; for as much as they differ'd not in the Fundamentals, and therefore were of use to them against Hereticks that were more dangerous and diametrically opposite to the Religion. Nay insomuch, that even the Bishop of *Constantinople*, yea of Rome, notwithstanding that most tender Point and Interest of Episcopacy, suffered the *Novatian* Bishops to walk cheek by jowl with them in their own Diocess; until that, as *Soer. l. 7. c. 11.* the Roman Episcopacy having, as it were, passed the bounds of Priesthood, slip'd into a Secular Principality, and thenceforward the Roman Bishops would not suffer their Meetings with Security; but, though they commended them for their consent in the same Faith with them, yet took away all their Estates. But at *Constantinople* they continued to fare better, the Bishops of that Church embracing the *Novatians*, and giving them free liberty to keep their Conventicles in their Churches. What, and to have their Bishops too, Altar

against Altar ? A Condescension, which as our Nonconformists seem not to desire, or think of, so the Wisdom of these times would, I suppose, judge to be very unreasonable, but rather that it were fit to take the other course, and that whatsoever Advantage the Religion might probably receive from their Doctrine & Party, 'tis better to suppress them, and make havock both of their Estates and Persons. But however, the Hereticks in *Constantine's* time had the less reason to complain of ill Measure, seeing it was that the Bishops meted by among themselves. I pass over that Controversy betwixt *Cecilianus* the Bishop of *Carthage*, and his Adherents, with another set of Bishops there in *Africa*; upon which, *Constantine* ordered ten of each Party to appear before *Miltiades* the Bishop of *Rome*, and others, to have it decided. Yet after they had given Sentence, *Constantine* found it necessary to have a Council for a review of the Business, as in his Letter to *Crestus* the Bishop of *Syracuse*, *Euseb.* l. 10. c. 6. *Whereas several have formerly separated from the Catholick Heresy,* (for that word was not yet so ill natured, but that it might sometimes be used in its proper and good sense); and then relates his Commission to the Bishop of *Rome*, and others; *But forasmuch as some having been careless of their own Salvation, and forgetting the reverence due to that most holy Heresy,* (again) *will not yet lay down their enmity, nor admit the Sentence that hath bin given, obstinately affirming, that they were but a few that pronounced the Sentence, and that they did it very precipitately, before they had duly enquired of the Matter; and from thence it hath happened, that both they who ought to have kept a brotherly and unanimous agreement together, do abominably and flagitiously dissent from one another; and such whose Minds are alienated from the most holy Religion, do make a mockery both of it and them. Therefore I, &c. have commanded very many Bishops, out of innumerable places, to meet at Arles, that what ought to have been quieted upon the former Sentence pronounced, may now at least be determined, &c. and you to be one of them; and therefore I have ordered the Prefect of Sicily to furnish you with one of the publick Stage-Coaches, and so many Servants, &c.*

Such was the use then of Stage-Coaches, Post-Horses, and Councils, to the great disappointment and grievance of the many, both Men and Horses, and Leather being Hackney, jaded, and worn out upon the Errand of some contentions and obstinate Bishop. So went the Affairs hitherto, and thus well disposed and prepared were the Bishops to receive the Holy Ghost a second time, at the great and first general Council of *Nice*, which is so much celebrated.

The occasions of calling it were two. The first a most important Question, in which the Wit and Piety of their Predecessors, and now theirs successively had been much exercised and taken up: that was upon what day they ought to keep *Easter*; which tho' it were no Point of Faith that it should be kept at all, yet the very Calendary of it, was controverted with the same zeal, and made as heavy ado in the Church, as if both Parties had been Hereticks. And it is reckon'd by the Church Historians, as one of the chief felicities of *Constantine's* Empire, to have quieted in that Council this main Controversy. The

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second cause of the assembling them here, was indeed grown, as the Bishops had order'd it, a Matter of the greatest weight and consequence to the Christian Religion; one *Arrius* having, as is related, to the disturbance of the Church, started a most pernicious Opinion in the Point of the Trinity. Therefore from all parts of the Empire, they met together at the City of *Nice*; 250 Bishops; and better, saith *Eusebius*, a goodly company; 318 say others; and the Animadverter too, with that pithy Remark, *Pag. 23. Equal almost to the number of Servants bred up in the House of Abraham.* The Emperor had accommodated them every where with the publick Posts, or laid Horses all along for the convenience of their Journey thither; and all the time they were there, supplied them abundantly with all sorts of Provision at his own charges. And when they were all first assemb'ed in Council, in the great Hall of the Imperial Palace, he came in, having put on his best Clothes, to make his Guests welcome; and saluted them with that profound Humility, as if they all had been Emperors, nor would sit down in his Throne; no, it was a very little & low Stool, till they had all beckoned & made signs to him to sit down. No wonder if the first Council of *Nice* run in their Heads ever after, and the ambitious Clergy, like those who have been long a-thirst, took so much of *Constantine's* Kindness, that they are scarce come to themselves again, after so many Ages. The first thing was that he acquainted them with the Causes of his summoning them thither, and in a grave and most Christian Discourse, exhorted them to keep the Peace, or to a good Agreement, as there was reason. For (saith *Ruffin. l. 1. c. 2.*) *the Bishops being met here from almost all parts, and as they use to do, bringing their Quarrels about several matters along with them, every one of them was at the Emperor, offering him Petitions, laying out one anothers Faults, (for all the good advice he had given them) and were more intent upon these things, than upon the business they were sent for. But he considering that by these Scoldings and Bickerings, the main Affair was frustrated, appointed a set-day by which all the Bishops should bring him in whatsoever complaint they had against one another.* And they being all brought, he made them that high Asiatick Complement; *God hath made you Priests, and hath given you power to judge me, and therefore it is in you to judge me righteously; but you cannot be judged by any Men. It is God only can judge you, and therefore reserve all your quarrels to his Tribunal. For you are as Gods to me, and it is not convenient that a Man should judge of Gods, but he only of whom it is written, God standing in the Congregation of the Gods, and discerneth in the midst of them: And therefore setting these things aside, apply your Minds, without any contention, to the concerns of God's Religion.* And so, without opening or reading one Petition, commanded them altogether to be burnt there in his presence. An Action of great Charity and excellent Wisdom, had but some of the words been spared. For doubtless, tho they that would have complained of their burthen, grumbled a little; yet those that were accusable were all very well satisfied: and those expressions, *You can judge me righteously, and, you cannot be judged by any Man;* and, *God only can judge you. You are Gods to me, &c.* were so extremely sweet



sweet to most of the Bishops Palates, that they believ'd it, and could never think of them afterwards, but their Teeth watered; and they ruminated so long on them, that *Constantine's* Successors came too late to repent it. But now the Bishops having mist of their great end of quarelling one with another, betake themselves, tho somewhat awkwardly, to Business. And it is necessary to mine, that as shortly as possible for the understanding of it, I give a cursory account of *Alexander* and *Arrius*, with some few others that were the most interess'd in that general & first great Revolution of *Ecclesiastical Affairs*, since the days of the Apostles. This *Alexander* was the Bishop of *Alexandria*, and appears to have been a pious old Man, but not equally prudent, nor in Divine things of the most capable; nor in conducting the Affairs of the Church very dextrous, but he was the Bishop. This Character that I have given of him, I am the more confirm'd in from some passages that follow, and all of them pertinent to the matter before me. They were used, *Sozem.* l. 2. c. 16. at *Alexandria*, to keep yearly a solemn Festival to the memory of *Peter*, one of their former Bishops, upon the same day that he suffer'd Martyrdom, which *Alexander* having celebrated at the Church, with publick Devotion, was sitting after at home, expecting some Guests to dine with him, *Sozem.* l. 2. c. 16. As he was alone, and looking towards the Sea-side, he saw a pretty way off, the Boys upon the Beach at an odd Recreation, imitating it seems the Rites of the Church, and Office of the Bishops; and was much delighted with the sight, as long as it appear'd an innocent and harmless representation: But when he observ'd them at last how they acted, the very administration of the Sacred Mysteries, he was much troubled; and sending for some of the chief of his Clergy, caus'd the Boys to be taken and brought before him. He asked them particularly what kind of Sport they had been at, and what the Words, and what the Actions were that they had used in it. After their fear had hindred them a while from answering, and now they were afraid of being silent, they confess'd that a Lad of their Play-fellows, one *Athanasius*, had Baptized some of them that were not yet initiated to those Sacred Mysteries: Whereupon *Alexander* inquired the more accurately what the Bishop of the Game had said, and what he did to the Boys he had baptized; what they also had answered or learned from him. At last, when *Alexander* perceiv'd by them, that this Pawn Bishop had made all his Removes right, and that the whole Ecclesiastical Order & Rites had been duly observ'd in their Interlude, he by the advice of his Priests about him, approv'd of that Mock-baptism, and determin'd that the Boys, *being once in the simpliciey of their minds dipped in the Divine Grace, ought not to be Re-baptized*, but he perfect'd it with the remaining Mysteries, which it is only lawful for Priests to administer. And then he deliver'd *Athanasius* and the rest of the Boys that had acted the parts of *Presbyters* and *Deacons*, to their Parents; calling God to witness, that they should be Educated in the Ministry of the Church, that they might pass their lives in that Calling which they had chosen by imitation. But as for *Athanasius*, in a short while after, *Alexander* took him to live with him, and be his Secretary, having



having caused him to be carefully Educated in the Schools of the best *Grammarians* and *Rhetoricians*; and he grew, in the opinion of all that spoke with him, a discreet and eloquent person, and will give occasion to be more than once mentioned again in this Discourse; I have translated this, in a manner, word for word from the Author. This good-natured old Bishop *Alexander*, that was so far from Anathemizing, that he did not so much as whip the Boys for the Profanation of the Sacrament against the Discipline of the Church, but without more doing, left them, for ought I see, at liberty, to regenerate as many more Lads upon the next Holy-day, as they thought convenient: He *Socr. l. 1. c. 3. being a Man that lived an easie and gentle life, had one day called his Priests, and the rest of his Clergy together, and fell on Philosophizing divinely among them, but something more subtilly and curiously (though I dare say he meant no harm) than was usual, concerning the Holy Trinity.* Among the rest, one *Arrius*, a Priest too of *Alexandria*, was there present, a Man who is described to have been a good Disputant; and others add, (the Capital Accusations of those times) that he had a mind to have been a Bishop, and bore a great pique at *Alexander*, for having been preferr'd before him to the See of *Alexandria*; but more are silent of any such matter; and *Sozom. l. 1. c. 14. saith, he was in great esteem with his Bishop.* But *Arrius, Socr. l. 1. c. 3. hearing his discourse about the Holy Trinity, and the Unity in the Trinity, conceiv'd that, as the Bishop stated it, he had reason to suspect he was introducing afresh into the Church, the Heresie of Sabellius the African, who Fatebatur unum esse Deum, & ita in unam essentiam Trinitatem adducebat, ut assereret nullam esse vere subjectam proprietatem personis, sed nomina mutari pro eo atque usus poscant, ut nunc de illo ut patre, nunc ut filio, nunc ut spiritu sancto differatur:* And thereupon, it seems, *Arrius* argued warmly for that opinion which was directly contrary to the *African*, driving the Bishop from one to a second, from a second to a third seeming absurdity, which I studiously avoid the relation of; that in all these things I may not give occasion for Mens understandings to work by their memories, and propagate the same errors by the same means they were first occasion'd. But hereby *Arrius* was himself blamed as the maintainer of those absurdities, which he affixed to the Bishops opinion, as is usual in the heat and wrangle of Disputation. Whereas Truth, for the most part, lies in the middle, but Men ordinarily seek for it in the extremities. Nor can I wonder that those ages were so fertile in what they called Heresies, when being given to meddling with the mysteries of Religion, further than humane apprehension, or divine revelation did or could lead them, some of the Bishops were so ignorant and gross, but others so speculative, acute, and refining in their conceptions, that there being moreover a good fat Bishoprick to boot in the case, it is rather admirable to me how all the Clergy from one end to another, could escape from being, or being accounted Hereticks. *Alexander* hereupon, *Soz. l. 1. c. 14. instead of stilling by more prudent Methods this new Controversie, took doubtless with a very good intention, a course that hath seldom been successful: makes himself judg of that wherein he had first been the Party, and calling to him some o-*  
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others of his Clergy, would needs sit in publick, to have a solemn set Disputation about the whole Matter. And while *Arrius* was at it Tooth and Nail against his Opposers, and the Arguments flew so thick, that they darkned the Air, and no Man could yet judg which side should have the Victory; the good Bishop for his part sat *hoy now hoy*, neither could tell in his Conscience of a long time, which had the better of it; but sometimes he lean'd on one side, and then on the other, and now encouraged and commended those of one Party, and presently the contrary; but at last, by his own weight, he cast the Scales against *Arrius*. And from thenceforward, he excommunicated *Arrius* for obstinacy, who writing in behalf of himself and his Followers to the Bishop, each one stating his own, and his Adversaries case, with the usual candor of such Men in such Matters; the Bishops too all over began to divide upon it, and after them their People. Inasmuch, that *Constantine*, out of a true paternal sense and care, found necessary to send a very prudent and eminent Person to *Alexandria*, to try if he could accommodate the Matter, giving him a Letter to *Alexander* and *Arrius*: How discreet, how Christian-like, I never read any thing of that nature equal to it, it is too long for me here to insert; but I gladly recommend my Reader to it, in the 2 *Ens. de vita Const.* c. 67. where he begins, *I understand the Foundation of the Controversy to have been this, That thou Alexander didst inquire of the Priests concerning a Passage in the Scripture; nay, didst ask them concerning a frivolous quillet of a question, what was each of their Opinions: And thou Arrius didst inconsiderately babble what thou neither at the beginning couldst conceive; and if thou hadst conceived so, oughtest not to have vented, &c.*

But the Clergy having got this once in the Wind, there was no beating them off the Scent. Which induced *Constantine* to think the convening of this Council the only Remedy to these Disorders. And a woful ado he had with them, when they were met, to manage and keep them in any tolerable decorum. It seemed like an Ecclesiastical Cock-pit, and a Man might have laid Wagers either way, the two Parties contending in good earnest, either for the Truth or the Victory; but the more unconcern'd, like enning Better, fate judiciously hedging, and so ordered their Matter, that which side soever prevail'd, they would be sure to be the Winners. They were indeed a most venerable Assembly, composed of some Holy, some Grave, some Wise, and some of them Learned Persons: And *Constantine* had so charitably burnt the Accusations they intended against one another, which might otherwise have depopulated and dispirited the Council, that all of them may be presumed in one or other respect, to have made a great Character. But I observe *Sor.* l. i. c. 16. that these great Bishops, although they only had the decisive Voices, yet thought fit to bring along with them, certain Men that were cunning at an Argument, to be auxiliary to them when it came to hard and tough Disputation; besides, that they had their Priests and Deacons ready at a dead list, alway to assist them: So that their Understandings seem'd to be sequester'd, and for their daily Faith, they depended upon what their Chaplains

lains would allow them. And in that quality *Athanasius* there waited upon *Alexander*, being his Deacon, (for as yet it seems Arch-Bishops nor Arch-Deacons were invented). And it is not improbable that *Athanasius* having so early personated the Bishop, and seeing the declining Age of *Alexander*, would be careful that *Arrian* should not step betwixt him and home upon Vacancy, but did his best against him to bar up his way, as it shortly after happened; *Athanasius* succeeding after the Council in the See of *Alexandria*. In the mean time you may imagine *Hypostasis*, *Persona*, *Substantia*, *Subsistentia*, *Essentia*, *Coesentialis*, *Consubstantialis*, *Ante saecula Coeternus*, &c. were by so many Disputants pick'd to the very Bones, and those too broken afterwards, to come to the Marrow of Divinity. And never had *Constantine* in his Life so hard a task, as to bring them to any rational Results; Meekly and patiently (Euseb. l. 3. c. 13. de Vita Const.) *listening to every one, taking every Man's Opinion, and without the Acrimony with which it was delivered, helping each Party where they disagreed, reconciling them by degrees when they were in the fiercest Contention, conferring with them apart courteously and mildly, telling them what was his own Opinion of the Matter*: Which tho some exception Persons may alleadg to have been against the nature of a free Council, yet truly, unless he had taken that course, I cannot imagine how possibly he could ever have brought them to any conclusion. And thus this first, Great, General Council of *Nice*, with which the World had gone big so long, and which look'd so big upon all Christendom, at last was brought in Bed, and after a very hard Labour, delivered of *Homonousios*.

They all subscribed to the new Creed, except some seventeen, who it seems had rather to be Hereticks than Bishops. For now the *Anathema's* were published, and whoever held the contrary, was to be punish'd by Deprivation and Banishment, all *Arrian* Books to be burned; and whoever should be discovered to conceal any of *Arrian* his Writings, to die for it. But it fared very well with those who were not such fools as to own his Opinion. All they were entertain'd by the Emperor at a magnificent Feast, received from his hand rich Presents, and were honourably dismiss'd, with Letters recommending their great Abilities and performance to the Provinces, and enjoining the *Nicene* Creed to be henceforth observed. With that stroke of the Pen, (*Socr. l. 1. c. 6.*) *For what three hundred Bishops have agreed on*, (a thing indeed extraordinary) *ought not to be otherwise conceiv'd of, than as the Deeree of God Almighty, especially seeing the Holy Ghost did sit upon the Minds of such and so excellent Men, and open'd his Divine Will to them*. So that they went, I trow, with ample satisfaction; and, as they could not but take the Emperor for a very civil, generous, and obliging Gentleman, so they thought the better of themselves from that day forward. And how budg must they look when they return back to their Diocesses, having every one of 'em bin a principal Limn of the *Oecumenical*, *Apostolical*, *Catholick*, *Orthodox* Council! when the *Catacheristical* Title of the Church and the Clergy were so appropriate to them by custom, that the Christian People had relinquish'd or forgotten their Claim; when

every Hare that crossed their way homeward, was a Schismatick or an Heretick ; and if their Horse stumbled with one of them, he incur'd an Anathema. Well it was that their Journeys lay so many several ways, for they were grown so cumbersome and great, that the Emperor's High-way was too narrow for any two of them, and there could have been no passage without the removal of a Bishop. But soon after the Council was over, *Ensebius* the Bishop of *Nicomedia*, and *Theognis* the Bishop of *Nice*, who were already removed, both by Banishment, and two others put in their places, were quickly restor'd upon their Petition; wherein they suggested the Cause of their not Signing to have been only, because they thought they could not with a safe Conscience subscribe the Anathema against *Arrius*, appearing to them both by his Writings, his Discourses, and Sermons, that they had been Auditors of; not to be guilty of those Errors. As for *Arrius* himself, the Emperor quickly wrote to him. *It is now a considerable time since I wrote to your Grace to come to my Tents, that you might enjoy my Countenance; so that I can scarce wonder sufficiently why you have so long delayed it: therefore now take one of the publick Coaches, and make all speed to my Tents; that, having had experience of my kindness and affection to you, you may return into your own Country. God preserve you, most dear Sir.* *Arrius* hereupon (with his Comerade *Euxoios*) comes to *Constantine's* Army, and offers him a Petition, with a Confession of Faith, that would have pass'd very well before the *Nicene* Council, and now satisfied the Emperor, *Secr. l. i. c. 19, & 20.* inso much that he writ to *Athanasius*, now Bishop of *Alexandria*, to receive him into the Church: but *Athanasius* was of better mettle than so, and absolutely refused it. Upon this *Constantine* writ him another threatening Letter: *When you have understood hereby my Pleasure, see that you afford free entrance into the Church, to all that desire it: for if I shall understand that any who desires to be admitted into the Church, should be either hindered or forbidden by you, I will send some one of my Servants to remove you from your Degree, and place another in your stead.* Yet *Athanasius* stood it out still, tho' other Churches received him into Communion: and the Heretick *Novatus* could not have bin more unrelenting to lapsed Christians, than he was to *Arrius*. But this, joined with other Crimes, which were laid to *Athanasius* his Charge, at the Council of *Tyre*, (though I suppose indeed they were forged) made *Athanasius* glad to fly for it, and remain the first time in Exile. Upon this whole Matter, it is my impartial Opinion that *Arrius*, or whosoever else were guilty of teaching and publishing those Errors whereof he was accused, deserved the utmost Severity which consists with the Christian Religion. And so willing I have been to think well of *Athanasius*, and ill of the other, that I have on purpose avoided the reading, as I do the naming of a Book that I have heard, tells the story quite otherwise, and have only made use of the current Historians of those Times, who all of them tell it against the *Arrians*. Only I will confess, that as in reading a particular History at adventure, a Man finds himself inclinable to favour the weaker Party, especially if the Conqueror appear insolent; so have I been affected in reading



these Authors, which does but resemble the reasonable pity that men ordinarily have too, for those, who, though for an erroneous Conscience, suffer under a Christian Magistrate. And as soon as I come to *Constantius*, I shall for that reason change my compassion, and be doubly engaged on the Orthodox party. But as to the whole matter of the Council of *Nice*, I must crave liberty to say, that from one end to the other, though the best of the kind, it seems to me to have been a pitiful humane business, attended with all the ill circumstances of other worldly affairs, conducted by a spirit of ambition and contention, the first, and so the greatest oecumenical blow that by Christians was given to Christianity. And it is not from any sharpness of humor that I discourse thus freely of Things and Persons, much less of Orders of men otherwise venerable, but that where ought is extolled beyond reason, and to the prejudice of Religion, it is necessary to depreciate it by true proportion. It is not their censure of *Arianism*, or the declaring of their Opinion in a controverted point to the best of their understanding, (wherein to the finalness of mine, they appear to have light upon the Truth, had they likewise upon the measure) that could have moved me to tell so long story, or bring my self within the danger and aim of any capitious Reader, speaking thus with great liberty of mind, but little concern for any prejudice I may receive, of things that are by some Men idolized. But it is their Imposition of a new Article or Creed upon the Christian world, not being contained in express words of Scripture, to be believed with Divine Faith, under Spiritual and Civil Penalties, contrary to the Privileges of Religion, and their making a Precedent follow'd and improv'd by all succeeding Ages for most cruel Persecutions, that only could animate me. In digging thus for a new deduction, they undermined the fabrick of Christianity, to frame a particular Doctrine, they departed from the general Rule of their Religion; and for their curiosity about an Article concerning *Christ*, they violated our Saviour's first Institution of a Church, not subject to any Addition in matters of Faith, nor liable to Compulsion, either in Belief or in Practice. Far be it from me in the event, as it is from my Intention, to derogate from the just authority of any of those Creeds or Confessions of Faith that are receiv'd by our Church upon clear agreement with the Scripture: nor shall I therefore, unless some mens impertinence and indiscretion hereafter oblige me, pretend to any further knowledge of what in those particulars appear in the ancient Histories. But certainly if any Creed had been Necessary, or at the least Necessary to have been Imposed, our Saviour himself would not have left his Church destitute in a thing of that moment. Or however, after the Holy Ghost, upon his departure, was descended upon the Apostles, and they the Elders and Brethren (for so it was then) were assembled in a legitimate Council at *Jerusalem*, it would have seem'd good to the Holy Ghost and them to have sav'd the Council of *Nice* that labour, or at least the Apostle *Paul*, 2 Cor. 12. 2, and 4. who was caught up into Paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for any Man to utter, having thereby a much better opportunity than *Athanasius*, to know the Doctrine of the Trinity, would not have been want-



ing, *through the abundance of that revelation*, to form a Creed for the Church, sufficient to have put that business beyond controverſie. Eſpecially ſeeing Hereties were ſprung up ſo early, and he foreſaw others, and therefore does preſcribe the method how they are to be dealt with, but no Creed that I read of.

Shall any ſort of Men preſume to interpret thoſe words, which to him were unſpeakable, by a Gibbriſh of their Impoſing, and force every Man to Cant after them, what it is not lawful for any Man to utter? *Chriſt* and his Apoſtles ſpeak articulately enough in the Scriptures, without any Creed, as much as we are or ought to be capable of. And the Miniſtry of the Goſpel is uſeful and moſt neceſſary, if it were but to preſs us to the reading of them, to illuſtrate one place by the authority of another, to inculcate thoſe duties which are therein required, quickning us both to Faith and Practice, and ſhowing within what bounds they are both circumscribed by our Saviour's Doctrine. And it becomes every Man to be able to give a reaſon and account of his Faith, and to be ready to do it, without officiouſly gratifying thoſe who demand it only to take advantage: and the more Chriſtians can agree in one confeſſion of Faith, the better. But that we ſhould believe ever the more for a Creed, it cannot be expected. In thoſe days, when Creeds were moſt plenty and in faſhion, and every one had them at their fingers end, 'twas the Bible that brought in the Reformation. 'Tis true, a Man would not ſtick to take two or three Creeds for a need, rather than want a Living; and if a Man have not a good ſwallow, 'tis but wrapping them up in a Liturgy, like a Wafer, and the whole doſe will go down currently; eſpecially if he wink at the ſame time, and give his Aſſent and Conſent without ever looking on them. But without jeſting, for the matter is too ſerious: Every Man is bound to *work out his own Salvation with fear and trembling*, and therefore to uſe all helps poſſible for his beſt ſatisfaction; hearing, conſerring, reading, praying for the aſſiſtance of God's Spirit: but when he hath done this, he is his own Expoſitor, his own both Miniſter and People, Biſhop and Dioceſs, his own Council; and his Conſcience excuſing or condemning him, accordingly he eſcapes or incurs his own internal Anathema. So that when it comes once to a Creed, made and impoſed by other Men as a matter of Divine Faith, the Caſe grows very delicate; while he cannot apprehend, tho the Impoſer may, that all therein is clearly contained in Scripture, and may fear, being caught in the expreſſions, to oblige himſelf to a latitude or reſtriction, further than comports with his own ſenſe and judgment. A Chriſtian of honour, when it comes to this once, will weigh every word, every ſyllable; nay further, if he conſider that the great buſineſs of this Council of Nice was but one ſingle letter of the Alphabet, about the inserting or omitting of an *Iota*. There muſt be either that exactneſs in the Form of ſuch a Creed, as I dare ſay, no Men in the world ever were or ever will be able to modulate: or elſe this ſcrupulous privat judgment muſt be admitted, or otherwiſe all Creeds become meer inſtruments of Equivocation or Perſecution. And I muſt confeſs, when I have ſometimes conſidered  
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with my self the dulness of the Non-conformists, and the acuteness on the contrary of the Episcoparians, and the conscientiousness of both; I have thought that our Church might safely wave the difference with them about Ceremonies, and try it upon the Creeds, which were both the more honourable way, and more suitable to the method of the ancient Councils, and yet perhaps might do their business as effectually. For one that is a Christian in good earnest, when a Creed is imposed, will sooner eat fire, than tak it against his judgment. There have been Martyrs for Reason, and it was manly in them: but how much more would Men be so for Reason Religionated and Christianized! But it is an Inhumane and Unchristian thing of those Faith-stretchers, whosoever they be, that either put Mens Persons, or their Consciences upon the torture, or rack them to the length of their Notions: whereas the *Bereans* are made Gentlemen, and Innobled by Patent in the *Acts*, because they would not credit *Paul* himself, whose Writings now make so great a part of the New-Testament, until they had searched the Scripture daily, whether those things were so, and therefore many of them believed. And therefore, although where there are such Creeds, Christians may for Peace and Conscience-sake acquiesce while there appears nothing in them flatly contrary to the words of the Scripture; yet when they are obtruded upon a Man in particular, he will look very well about him, and not take them upon any Humane Authority. The greatest Pretence to Authority, is in a Council. But what then? Shall all Christians therefore take their Formularies of Divine Worship or Belief upon trust, as writ in Tables of Stone, like the Commandments, deliver'd from Heaven, and to be obeyed in the instant, not considered; because three hundred and eighteen Bishops are met in *Abraham's* great Hall, of which most must be Servants, and some Children; and they have resolv'd upon't in such a manner? No, a good Christian will not, cannot attorn and indenture his Conscience over, to be Represented by others. It is not as in Secular matters, where the States of a Kingdom are deputed by their fellow Subjects to transact for them, so in spiritual: or suppose it were, yet 'twere necessary, as in the *Polish* constitution, that nothing should be obligatory as long as there is one Dissenter, where no Temporal Interests, but every Mans Eternity and Salvation are concerned. The Soul is too precious to be let out at interest upon any humane security, that does or may fail; but it is only safe when under God's custody, in its own Cabinet. But it was a General Council: A special General indeed, if you consider the proportion of three hundred and eighteen to the Body of the Christian Clergy, but much more to all Christian Man-kind. But it was a General Free Council of Bishops. I do not think it possible for any Council to be free, that is composed out of Bishops, and where they only have the Decisive Voices. Nor that a Free Council that takes away Christian Liberty. But that, as it was founded upon Usurpation, so it terminated in Imposition. But 'tis meant, that it was Free from all external Impulsion. I confess that good Meat and Drink, and Lodging, and Mony in a Man's purse, and Coaches, and Servants, and Horses to attend them, did no violence

jence to 'em, nor was there any false Article in it. And discoursing now with one, and then another of 'em in particular, and the Emperor telling them this is my opinion, I understand it thus; and afterwards declaring his mind frequently to them in publick; no force neither. Ay, but there was a shrewd way of persuasion in it. And I would be glad to know when ever, and which free general Council it was that could properly be called so; but was indeed a meer Imperial or Ecclesiastical Machine, no free agent, but wound up, set on going, and let down by the direction and hand of the Workman. A General Free Council is but a word of Art, and can never happen but under a Fifth Monarch, and that Monarch too, to return from Heaven. The Animadverter will not allow the second General Council of *Nice* to have bin Free, *because it was overaw'd by an Empress*, and was guilty of a great fault (which no Council at liberty he saith could have committed) the Decree for worshipping of Images. At this rate a Christian may scuffle however for one point among them, and chuse which Council he likes best. But in good earnest, I do not see but that *Constantine* might as well at this first Council of *Nice*, have negotiated the Image-worship, as to pay that superstitious adoration to the Bishops, and that Prostration to their Creeds was an Idolatry more pernicious in the consequence, to the Christian Faith, then that under which they so lately had suffer'd Persecution. Nor can a Council be said to have been at liberty, which lay under so great and many obligations. But the Holy Ghost was present, where there were three hundred and eighteen Bishops, and directed them, or three hundred. Then, if I had been of their Council, they should have sate at it all their lives, lest they should never see him again: after they were once risen. But it concerned them to settle their *Quorum* at last by his Dictates; otherwise no Bishop could have been absent, or gone forth upon any accusation, but he let him out again: and it behov'd to be very punctual in the Adjournments: 'Tis a ridiculous conception, and as gross as to make him of the same substance with the Council. Nor needs there any stronger argument of his absence, then their pretence to be actuated by him, and in doing such work. The Holy Spirit! If so many of them, when they got together, acted like rational men, 'twas enough in all reason, and as much as could be expected.

But this was one affectation, among many others, which the Bishops took up so early, of the stile, priviledges, powers, and some actions and gestures peculiar and inherent to the Apostles, which they misplaced to their own behoof and usage; nay, and challenged other things as Apostolical, that were directly contrary to the Doctrine and Practice of the Apostles. For so, because the Holy Spirit did in an extraordinary manner preside among the Holy Apostles at that Legitimate Council of *Jerusalem*, *Acts 15.* they, although under an ordinary Administration, would not go less whatever came on't: nay, whereas the Apostles, in the drawing up of their Decree, dictated to them by the Holy Spirit, said therefore no more but thus: *The Apostles, Elders, and Brethren, send greeting unto the Brethren of, &c. Forasmuch as, &c. It seemed good to the Holy Ghost and us, so say upon you no greater burthen than these necessary things:*

things; that ye abstain from, &c. from which if ye keep your selves, you shall do well. Fare ye well.

This Council denounces every Invention of its own, (far from the Apostolical modesty, and the stile of the Holy Spirit) under no less than an *Anathema*. Such was their arrogating to their inferior degrees, the stile of *Clergy*, till custom hath so much prevailed, that we are at a loss how to speak properly, either of the Name or Nature of their Function. Whereas the *Clergy*, in the true and Apostolical sense, were only those whom they superciliously always call the *Laity*: The word *Clerus* being never but once used in the New Testament, and in that signification, and in a very unlucky place too, 1 *Pet.* 5. 3. where he admonishes the Priesthood, that they should not lord it, or domineer over the Christian People, *Clerum Domini*, or the Lord's Inheritance. But having usurp'd the Title, I confess they did right to assume the Power. But to speak of the Priesthood in that stile which they most affect, if we consider the nature too of their Function, what were the *Clergy* then, but Laymen disguis'd, drest up perhaps in another habit? Did not St. *Paul* himself, being a Tent-maker, rather than be idle or burthensom to his People, work of his trade, even during his Apostleship, to get his living? But did not these, that they might neglect their holy Vocation, seek to compass secular Employments, and Lay-Offices? Were not very many of them, whether one respect their Vices or Ignorance, as well qualified as any other to be Lay-men? Was it not usual, as oft as they merited it, to restore them, as in the case even of the three Bishops to the Lay-communion? And whether, if they were so peculiar from others, did the Imposition of the Bishop's hands, or the lifting up the hands of the Laity, confer more to that distinction? And *Constantine*, notwithstanding his Complement at the burning of the Bishops Papers, thought he might make them, and unmake them, with the same Power as he did his other Lay-Officers. But if the inferior Degrees were the *Clergy*, the Bishops would be the Church: altho that word in the Scripture-sense, is proper only to a Congregation of the Faithful. And being by that title the only Men in Ecclesiastical Councils, then when they were once assembled, they were the *Catholic Church*, and, having the Holy Spirit at their Devotion, whatsoever Creed they light upon, that was the *Catholic Faith*, without the believing of which, no Man can be saved. By which means there rose thenceforward so constant Persecutions till this day, that, had not the little invisible *Catholic Church*, and a People that always search'd and believ'd the Scriptures, made a stand by their Testimonies and Sufferings, the Creeds had destroy'd the Faith, and the Church had ruined the Religion. For this General Council of *Nice*, and all others of the same constitution, did, and can serve to no other end or effect, than a particular order of Men by their usurping a trust upon Christianity, to make their own Price and Market of it, and deliver it up as oft as they see their own advantage.

For scarce was *Constantine's* Head cold, but his Son *Constantine*, succeeding his Brothers, being influenced by the Bishops of the *Arrian* Party, turn'd the wrong side of Christianity outward, inverted the Poles of Heaven, and  
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Faith (if I may say so) with its Heels in the Air, was forced to stand upon its Head, and play Gambols, for the Divertisement and Pleasure of the *Homoiousians*. *Arrianism* was the Divinity then in Mode, and he was an ignorant and ill Courtier, or Church-man, that could not dress, and would not make a new Sute for his Conscience in the Fashion. And now the Orthodox Bishops (it being given to those Men to be obstinate for Power, but flexible in Faith) began to wind about insensibly, as the *Heliotrope Flower* that keeps its ground, but wrests its neck in turning after the warm Sun, from day-break to evening. They could look now upon the Synod of *Nice* with more indifference, and all that pudder that had been made there betwixt *Homoousius* and *Homoiousius*, &c. began to appear to them as a *Difference only arising from the Inadequation of Languages*: Till by degrees they were drawn over, and rather than lose their Bishopricks, would join, and at last be the head-most in the Persecution of their own former Party. But the Deacons, to be sure, that steer'd the Elephants, were thorow-paced; Men to be reckon'd and relied upon in this or any other occasion, and would prick on, to render themselves capable and Episcopable, upon the first Vacancy. For now the *Arrians* in grain, scorning to come behind the Clownish *Homoousians*, in an Ecclesiastical Civility, were resolved to give them their full of Persecution. And it seem'd a piece of Wit rather than Malice, to pay them in their own Coin, and to *Burlesque* them in earnest, by the repetition and heightning of the same Severities upon them, that they had practised upon others. Had you the *Homoousians* a Creed at *Nice*? we will have another Creed for you at *Ariminum*, and at *Selucia*. Would you not be content with so many several Projects of Faith consonant to Scripture, unless you might thrust the new word *Homoousios* down our Throats, and then tear it up again, to make us confess it? Tell us the word, ('twas *Homoiousios*) we are now upon the Guard, or else we shall run you thorow. Would you Anathemize, Banish, Imprison, Execute us, and burn our Books? You shall taste of this Christian Fare, and as you relish it, you shall have more on't provided. And thus it went, *Arrianism* being Triumphant, but the few sincere and stomachful Bishops, adhering constantly, and with a true Christian Magnanimity, especially *Arhanasius*, thorow all Sufferings, unto their former Confessors, expiated so in some measure, what they had committed in the *Nicene Council*.

*Sozomen*, l. 4. c. 25. first tells us a Story of *Eudoxius*, who succeeded *Macedonius*, in the Bishopricks of *Constantinople*; that in the Cathedral of *Santa Sophia*, being mounted in his Episcopal Throne, the first time that they Assembled for its Dedication, in the very beginning of his Sermon to the People (those things were already come in Fashion) told them: *Patrem impium esse, Filium autem pium*; at which then they began to baffle; *Pray be quiet*, saith he; I say, *Patrem impium esse, quia Colit neminem, Filium vero Pium quia colit Patrem*; at which they then laughed as heartily, as before they were Angry. But this I only note to this purpose, that there were some of the greatest Bishops among the *Homoiousians*, as well as the *Homoousians*, that could not reproach



proach one anothers Simplicity, and that it was not impossible for the *Many* to be wiser and more Orthodox than the *Few*, in Divine matters. That which I cite him for as most Material, is, the Remark upon the Imposition then of Contrary Creeds: Which verily, saith he, was plainly the beginning of most great Calamities, forasmuch as hereupon there followed a Disturbance, not unlike those which we before recited over the whole Empire; and likewise a Persecution equal almost to that of the Heathen Emperors, seized upon all of all Churches. For although it seemed to some more gentle, for what concerns the torture of the body, yet to prudent persons it appeared more bitter and severe, by reason of the Dishonour and Ignominy. For both they who stirred up, and those that were afflicted with this Persecution, were of the Christian Church; and the grievance therefore was the greater and more ugly, in that the same things which are done among Enemies, were Executed between those of the same Tribe and Profession: But the holy Law forbids us to carry our selves in that manner, even to those that are without, and Aliens. And all this mischief sprung from making of Creeds, with which the Bishops, as it were at Tilting, aim'd to hit one another in the Eye, and throw the opposite Party out of the Saddle. But if it chanced that the weaker side were ready to yield, (for what sort of Men was there that could better manage, or had their Consciences more at command at that time than the Clergy?) Then the *Arrians* would use a yet longer, thicker, and sharper Lance for the purpose, (for there were never Vacancies sufficient) that they might be sure to run them down, over, and thorow, and do their Business. The Creed of *Ariminum* was now too short for the Design; but, saith the Historian, they affix'd further Articles like Labels to it, pretending to have made it better, and so sent it thorow the Empire with *Constantius* his Proclamation, that whoever would not subscribe it, should be Banished. Nay, they would not admit their own beloved *Similis Substantia*; but to do the work throughly, the *Arrians* renounc'd their own Creed for Malice, and made it an Article; *Filium Patri tam substantia, quam Voluntate, Dissimilem esse*. But this is a small matter with any of them, provided thereby they may do Service to the Church, that is their Party. So that one (seriously speaking) that were really Orthodox, could not then defend the Truth or himself, but by turning of *Arrian*, if he would impugn the new ones; such was the Subtily. What shall I say more? As the Arts of Glafs Coaches and Perriwigs illustrate this Age, so by their Trade of Creed-making, then first invented, we may esteem the Wisdom of *Constantine's*, and *Constantius* his Empire. And in a short space, as is usual among Tradesmen, where it appears gainful, they were so many that set up of the same Profession, that they could scarce live by one another. *Socr.* l. 2. c. 32. Therefore uses these words. But now that I have tandem aliquando, run through this Labyrinth of so many Creeds, I will gather up their number: And so reckons Nine Creeds more, besides that of *Nice*, before the death of *Constantine*, (a blessed Number.) And I believe I could for a need, make them up a dozen, if Men have a mind to buy them so. And hence it was that *Hilary*, then Bishop of *Poitiers*, represents that state of the Church pleasantly, yet sadly, Since the Nicene Synod,

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saith he, we do nothing but write Creeds. That while we fight about words, whilst we raise Questions about Novelties, while we Quarrel about things doubtful, and about Authors, while we contend in Parties, while there is difficulty in Consent, while we Anathematize one another, there is none now almost that is Christ's. What a Change there is in the last years Creed? The first Decree commands that Homouousios should not be mentioned. The next does again Decree and Publish Homouousios. The third does by Indulgence excuse the Word Ousia, as used by the Fathers in their simplicity. The fourth does not Excuse, but Condemn it. It is come to that at last, that nothing among us, or those before us, can remain sacred or inviolable. We Decree every year of the Lord, a new Creed concerning God; Nay, every Change of the Moon our Faith is alter'd. We repent of our Decrees, we defend those that repent of them; we Anathematize those that we defended; and while we either condemn other Mens Opinions in our own, or our own Opinions in those of other Men, and bite at one another, we are now all of us torn in pieces. This Bishop sure was the Author of the Naked Truth, and 'twas he that implicitely condemn'd the whole Catholick Church, both East and West, for being too presumptuous in her Definitions.

It is not strange to me, that Julian, being but a Reader in the Christian Church, should turn Pagan: Especially when I consider that he succeeded Emperor after Constantius. For it seems rather unavoidable that a man of great Wit, as he was, and not having the Grace of God to direct it, and show him the Beauty of Religion, through the Deformity of its Governours and Teachers; but that he must conceive a Loathing and Aversion for it, Nor could he think that he did them any Injustice, when he observed that, beside all their Unchristian Immorality too, they practised thus against the Institutive Law of their Galilean, the Persecution among themselves for Religion. And well might he add to his other Severities, that sharpness of his Wit, both *Exposing* and *Animadverting* upon them, at another rate than any of the Modern Practitioners with all their study and Inclination, can ever arrive at. For nothing is more punishable, Contemptible, and truly Ridiculous, than a Christian that walks contrary to his Profession: And by how much any man stands with more advantage in the Church for Eminency, but disobeys the Laws of Christ by that privilege, he is thereby, and deserves to be the more Exposed. But Julian, the last Heathen Emperor, by whose cruelty it seemed that God would sensibly admonish once again the Christian Clergy, and show them by their own smart, and an Heathen-hand, the nature and odiousness of Persecution, soon died, as is usual for Men of that Employment, not without a remarkable stroke of Gods Judgement.

Yet they, as they were only sorry that they had lost so much time, upon his death strove as eagerly to redeem it, and forthwith fell in very naturally into their former Animosities. For Jovianus being chosen Emperor in Persia, and returning homeward, *Socr.* l. 3. c. 20. The Bishops of each party, in hopes that theirs should be the Imperial Creed, strait took Horse, and rode away with Switch and Spur, as if it had been for the Plate, to meet him; and he that had

had best Heels, made himself cock-sure of winning the Religion. The *Macedonians*, who dividing from the *Arrians*, had set up for a new Heresie concerning the Holy Ghost, (and they were a Squadron of Bishops) Petition'd him that those who held, *Filium Patri dissimilem*, might be turn'd out, and themselves put in their places: Which was very honestly done, and above-board. The *Acacians*, that were the refined *Arrians*, but, as the Author saith, *Had a notable faculty of addressing themselves to the Inclination of whatsoever Emperor*, and having good Intelligence that he balanced rather to the *Consubstantials*, presented him with a very fair Insinuating Subscription, of a considerable number of Bishops to the Council of *Nice*. But in the next Emperors time they will be found to yield little Reverence to their own Subscription. For in matter of a Creed, a Note of their Hand, without expressing the Penalty, could not it seems bind one of their Order. But all that *Jovianus* said to the *Macedonians*, was; *I hate Contention, but I lovingly embrace and reverence those who are inclined to Peace and Concord.* To the *Acacians*, who had wisely given these the precedence of Application, to try the truth of their Intelligence, he said no more (*having resolv'd by sweetness and persuasions to quiet all their Controversies*) but, *That he would not molest any man whatsoever Creed he follow'd, but those above others he would Cherish and Honour, who should show themselves most forward in bringing the Church to a good Agreement.* He likewise call'd back all those Bishops who had been Banish'd by *Constantius*, and *Julian*, restoring them to their Sees. And he writ a Letter in particular to *Athanasius*, who upon *Julian's* death had enter'd again upon that of *Alexandria*, to bid him be of good courage. *And these things coming to the Ears of all others, did wonderfully assuage the Fierceness of those who were Inflamed with Faction and Convention:* So that, the Court having declared it self of this Mind, the Church was in a short time in all outward appearance peaceably disposed, the Emperor by this means having wholly repressed all their violence. Verily, concludes the Historian, *the Roman Empire had been prosperous and happy, and both the State and the Church (he puts them too in that Order) under so good a Prince, must have exceedingly flourished, had not an Immature death taken him away from managing the Government.* For after seven Months, being seized with a mortal Obstruction, he departed this Life. Did not this Historian, trow you, deserve to be handled, and is it not, now the Mischief is done, to undo the Charm, oecome a Duty, to Expose both him and *Jovianus*? By their ill chosen Principles, what would have become of the Prime and most necessary Article of Faith? Might not the old Dormant Heresies, all of them safely have Revived?

But that Mortal Obstruction of the Bishops, was not by his death (nor is it by their own to be) removed. They were glad he was so soon got out of their way, and God would yet further manifest their intractable Spirit, which not the Persecution of the Heathen Emperor *Julian*, nor the Gentleness of *Jovianus* the Christian, could allay or mitigate by their Afflictions or Prosperity. The Divine Nemesis executed Justice upon them, by one anothers hand:

And so heinous a Crime as for a Christian, a Bishop to Persecute, stood yet in need, as the only equal and exemplary Punishment, of being reveng'd with a Persecution by Christians, by Bishops. And whosoever shall seriously consider all along the Successions of the Emperors, can never have taken that satisfaction in the most judicious Representations of the Scene, which he may in this worthy Speculation of the great Order and admirable conduct of wise Providence; through the whole contexture of these Exterior seeming Accidents, relating to the Ecclesiasticals of Christianity.

For to *Jovianus* succeeded *Valentinian*, who in a short time took his Brother *Valens* to be his Companion in the Empire. These two Brothers did as the Historian observes, *Socr.* l. 4. c. 1. (alike, and equally take care at the beginning for the advantage and government of the State) but very much disagreed, though both Christians, in matters of Religion: *Valentinianus* the Elder being an *Orthodox*, but *Valens* an *Arrian*, and they used a different Method toward the Christians. For *Valentinian* (who chose the western part of the Empire, and left the East to his Brother) as he embraced those of his own Creed, so yet he did not in the least molest the *Arrians*: But *Valens* not only labor'd to increase the number of the *Arrians*, but afflicted those of the contrary Opinion with grievous Punishments. And both of 'em, especially *Valens*, had Bishops for their purpose. The particulars of that heavy Persecution under *Valens*, any one may further satisfy himself of in the Writers of those times: And yet it is observable, that within a little space while he pursued the *Orthodox* Bishops, he gave Liberty to the *Novatians*, (who were of the same Creed, but separated from them, as I have said, upon Discipline, &c.) and caused their Churches, which for a while were shut up, to be opened again at *Constantinople*. To be short, *Valens* (who out-lived his Brother, that died of a natural Death) himself in a Battel against the *Goths*, could not escape neither the fate of a Christian Persecutor. For the *Goths* having made application to him, he, saith *Socrates*, not well fore-seeing the Consequence, admitted them to Inhabit in certain places of *Thracia*, pleasing himself that he should by that means always have an Army ready at hand against whatsoever Enemies; and that those Foreign Guards would strike them with a greater Terror, more by far than the Militia of his Subjects. And so slighting the ancient *Veterane Militia*, which used to consist of Bodies of Men, raised proportionably in every Province, and were stout Fellows that would Fight Manfully; instead of them he levied Money, rating the Country at so much for every Souldier. But these new Inmates of the Emperors soon grew Troublesome, as is customary, and not only infested the Natives in *Thracia*, but Plunder'd even the Suburbs of *Constantinople*, there being no Armed Force to repress them: Hereupon the whole People of the City cried out at a publick Spectacle, where *Valens* was present neglecting this matter, Give us Arms and we will manage this War our selves. This extremely provok'd him, so that he forthwith made an Expedition against the *Goths*: But Threatned the Citizens if he return'd in safety, to be Reveng'd on them both for those *Conumelies*, and for what under the Tyrant *Procopius*, they had committed against



gainst the Empire; and that he would Raze to the Ground, and Plow up the City. Yet before his departure out of the fear of the Foreign Enemy, he totally ceas'd from persecuting the Orthodox in Constantinople. But he was kill'd in the Fight, or Flying into a Village that the Goths had set on fire, he was burnt to ashes, to the great grief of his Bishops; who, had he been Victorious, might have reviv'd the Persecution. Such was the end of his Impetuous Reign and rash Counsels, both as to his Government of State, in matters of Peace and War, and his Manage of the Church by Persecution.

His death brings me to the Succession of *Theodosius the Great*, than whom no Christian Emperor did more make it his business to Nurse up the Church, and to Lull the Bishops, to keep the House in quiet. But neither was it in his power to still their Bawling, and Scratching one another, as far as their Nails (which were yet more tender, but afterwards grew like Talions) would give them leave. I shall not further vex the History, or the Reader, in recounting the particulars; taking no delight neither my self in so uncomfortable Relations, or to reflect beyond what is necessary upon the Wolfishness of those which then seem'd, and ought to have been the Christian Pastors, but went on scattering their Flocks, if not devouring; and the Shepherds smiting one another. In his Reign, the second General Council was called, that of *Constantinople*, and the Creed was there made, which took its name from the place: The rest of their business, any one that is further curious, may observe in the Writers. But I shall close this with a short touch concerning *Gregory Nazianzen*, then living, than whom also the Christian Church had not in those times (and I question whether in any succeeding) a Bishop that was more a Christian, more a Gentleman, better appointed in all sorts of Learning requisite, seasoned under *Julian's* Persecution, and exemplary to the highest pitch of true Religion, and Practical Piety. The eminence of these Vertues, and in special of his Humility (the lowliest, but the highest of all Christian Qualifications) rais'd him under *Theodosius*, from the Parish-like Bishoprick of *Nazianzum*, to that of *Constantinople*, where he fill'd his place in that Council. But having taken notice in what manner things were carried in that, as they had been in former Councils, and that some of the Bishops muttered at his promotion; he of his own mind resign'd that great Bishoprick, whis was never of his desire or seeking; and, though so highly seated in the Emperors Reverence and Favor, so acceptable to the People, and generally to the Clergy, whose unequal Abilities could not pretend or justify an envy against him; retired back for more content, to a Solitary Life, to his little *Nazianzum*. And from thence he writes that Letter to his Friend *Procopius*, wherein p. 418. upon his most recollected and serious reflexion on what had pass'd within his observation, he useth these remarkable words: *I have resolv'd with my self (if I may tell you the Naked Truth,) never more to come into any Assembly of Bishops: for I never saw a good and happy end of any Council, but which rather increased than remedied the mischiefs. For their obstinate Contentions and Ambition are unexpressible.*

It would require too great a Volume to deduce, from the death of *Theodosius*, the particulars that happened in the succeeding Reigns about this matter. But the Reader may reckon that it was as stated a Quarrel betwixt the *Homoonians*, and the *Homoiousians*, as that between the Houses of *York* and *Lincaſter* ; And there aroſe now an Emperor of one Line, and then again of the other. But among all the Biſhops, there was not one *Morton*, whoſe *induſtrious Brain* could or would (for ſome Men always reap by Diviſion) *make up the fatal Breach betwixt the two Creeds*. By this means every Creed was grown up to a Teſt, and under that pretence, the dextrous Biſhops ſtep by ſtep hooked within their Verge, all the buſineſs and Power that could be caught in thoſe Turbulences, where they muddled the Water, and Fiſhed after. By this means they ſtalked on firſt to a Spiritual kind of Dominion, and from that increached upon and into the Civil Jurisdiction. A Biſhop now grew terrible, and (whereas a ſimple Layman might have frightened the Devil with the firſt words of the Apoſtles Creed, and *I deſie thee Satan*) one Creed could not protect him from a Biſhop, and it required a much longer, and a double and treble Confession, unleſs himſelf would be delivered over to *Satan* by an *Anathema*. But this was only an Eccleſiaſtical ſentence at firſt, with which they marked out ſuch as ſinned againſt them, and then whoop'd and hallow'd on the Civil Magiſtrate, to hunt them down for their Spiritual Pleaſure. They crept at firſt by Court Inſinuations & Flattery into the Princes favor, till thoſe generous Creatures ſuffered themſelves to be backed & ridden by them, who would take as much of a free Horſe as poſſible: But in Perſecution the Clergy as yet, wiſely interpoſed the Magiſtrate betwixt themſelves & the People, not caring ſo their end were attained, how odious they rendred him : And you may obſerve that for the moſt part hitherto, they ſtood crouching & ſhot either over the Emperors back, or under his belly. But in proceſs of time they became bolder and open-fac'd, and Perſecuted before the Sun at Mid-day. Biſhops grew worſe, but Biſhopricks every day better and better. There was now no *Eusebius* left to reſuſe the Biſhoprick of *Antiochia*, whom therefore *Conſtantine* told, *That he deſerv'd the Biſhoprick of the whole World for that Modeſty*. They were not ſuch Fools as *Ammonius Parates*, I warrant you, in the time of *Theodoſius*. He, *Socr. l. 6. c. 30.* being ſeiſed upon by ſome that would needs make him a Biſhop, when he could not perſwade them to the contrary, cut off one of his Ears, telling them that now ſhould he himſelf deſire to be a Biſhop, he was by the Law of *Prieſthood* incapable : but when they obſerved that thoſe things only obliged the *Jewiſh Prieſthood*, and that the *Church of Chriſt* did not conſider whether a *Prieſt* were ſound or perfect in limb of Body, but only that he were intire in his manners ; they return'd to ſeiſe on him again : But when he ſaw them coming, he ſwore with a ſolemn Oath, that if, to Conſecrate him a Biſhop, they laid violent hands upon him, he would cut out his tongue alſo ; whereupon they fearing he would do it, deſiſted. What ſhould have been the matter, that a man ſo Learned and Holy, ſhould have ſuch an averſion to be promoted in his own Order ; that, rather than yield to be a Compelled or

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Compelling Bishop, he would inflict upon himself as severe a Martyrdom, as any Persecutor could have done for him? Sure he saw something more in the very Constitution, than some do at present. But this indeed was an Example too Rigid, and neither fit to have been done, nor to be imitated, as there was no danger. For far from this they followed the precedent rather of *Damasus* and *Ursinus*, which last, *Socr. l. 4 c. 24.* in *Valentinian's* time, persuaded certain obscure and abject Bishops (for there were it seems of all sorts and sizes) to create him Bishop in a Corner, and then (so early) he and *Damasus*, who was much the better Man, waged War for the Bishoprick of *Rome*, to the great scandal of the *Pagan* Writers, who made Remarks for this and other things upon their Christianity, and to the Bloodshed and Death of a multitude of the Christian People. But this last I mention'd, only as a weak and imperfect Essay in that time, of what it came to in the several Ages after, which I am now speaking of, when the Bishops were given, gave themselves over to all manner of Vice, Luxury, Pride, Ignorance, Superstition, Covetousness, and Monopolizing of all secular Employments and Authority. Nothing could escape them: They meddled, troubled themselves and others, with many things, every thing, forgetting that one, only needful. Infomuch that I could not avoid wondring often, that among so many Churches that with *Paganick* Rites they dedicated to Saint *Mary*, I have met with none to Saint *Martha*. But above all, Imposition and Cruelty became inherent to them, and the power of Persecution was grown so good and desirable a thing, that they thought the Magistrate scarce worthy to be trusted with it longer, and a meer Novice at it, and either wrested it out of his hands, or gently eased him of that and his other burdens of Government. The sufferings of the Laity were become the Royalties of the Clergy; and, being very careful Christians, the Bishops that not a word of our Saviour might fall to the ground, because he had foretold how men should be persecuted for his Names sake, they undertook to see it done effectually in their own Provinces, and out of pure zeal of doing him the more Service of this kind, enlarged studiously their Diocesses beyond all proportion. Like *Nostradamus* his Son, that to fulfil his Father's prediction of a City in *France*, that should be burned; with his own hands set it on fire. All the Calamities of the Christian world in those Ages, may be derived from them, while they warm'd themselves at the Flame; and like Lords of Misrule, kept a perpetual *Christmas*. What in the Bishops name is the matter? How it came about that Christianity, which approved it self under all Persecutions to the Heathen Emperors, and merited their favour so far, till at last it regularly succeeded to the Monarchy, should under those of their own Profession be more distressed? Were there some Christians then too, that feared still lest Men should be Christians, and for whom it was necessary, not for the Gospel reason that there should be Heresies. Let us collect a little now also in the conclusion what at first was not particulariz'd, how the reason of State and Measure of Government stood under the *Roman* Emperours, in aspect to them. I omit *Tiberius*, mention'd in the beginning of this Essay.

*Emper. Trajane*, after having persecuted them, and having used *Pliny* the second in his Province to that purpose, upon his relation that they lived in conformity to all Law, but that which forbad their Worship, and in all other things were blameless, and good men, straitly by his Edict commanded that none of them should be farther enquired after. *Hadrian*, in his Edict to *Minutius Fundanus*, Proconsul of *Asia*, commands him that, *If any accuse the Christians, and can prove it, that they commit any thing against the State, that then he punish them according to the crime: but if any man accuse them, meerly for calumny and vexation, as Christians, then i<sup>st</sup> faith let him suffer for't, and take you care that he feel the smart of it.* *Antoninus Pius* writ his Edict very remarkable, if there were place to recite it, to the States of *Asia* Assembled at *Ephesus*, wherein he takes notice of his Fathers command, that unless the Christians were found to act any thing against the Roman Empire, they should not be molested, and then commands, that if any man thereafter shall continue to trouble them, tanquam tales, as Christians, for their Worship, in that case, he that is the Informer, should be exposed to punishment, but the Accused should be free and discharged. I could not but observe that among other things in this Edict, where he is speaking. *It is desirable to them that they may appear, being accused, more willing to die for their God than to live: He adds, It would not be amiss to admonish you concerning the Earth-quakes which have, and do now happen, that when you are afflicted at them, you would compare our affairs with theirs. They are thereby so much the more incouraged to a confidence and reliance upon God, but you all the while go on in your ignorance, and neglect both other gods, and the Religion towards the immortal, and banish and persecute them unto death.* Which words of that Emperors, fall in so naturally with what, it seems, was a common observation about Earth-quakes, that I cannot but to that purpose take further notice, how also *Gregory Nazianzen*, in *Or. 2. contra Gentiles*, tells, besides the breakings in of the Sea in several places, and many fires that happened, of the Earth-quakes in particular, which he reckons as Symptoms of *Julian's* Persecution. And to this I may add, *Socr. l. 3. c. 10*, who in the Reign of *Valens*, that notorious Christian Persecutor, saith, at the same time there was an Earth-quake in *Bithynia*, which turned the City of *Nice* (that same in which the general Council was held under *Constantine*) and a little after there was another. But although these so happened, the minds of *Valens*, and of *Eudoxius*, the Bishop of the *Arrians*, were not all stirred up unto Piety, and a right opinion of Religion. For nevertheless they ceased not, made no end of persecuting those who in their Creed dissented from them. Those Earth-quakes seemed to be certain indications of tumults in the Church. All which put together, could not but make me reflect upon the late Earth-quakes, great by how much more unusual here in *England*, thorow so many Counties two years since, at the same time when the Clergy, some of them, were so busie in their Cabals, to promote this (I would give it a modest name than) Persecution, which is now on foot against the Dissenters; at so unseasonable a time, and upon no occasion administred by them, that those who comprehend the reasons, yet cannot but wonder at the wisdom of



of it. Yet I am not neither one of the most credulous nickers or appliers of natural events to human transfections: But neither am I so secure as the Learned Dr. *Spencer*, nor can walk along the world without having some eye to the conjunctures of God's admirable Providence. Neither was *Marcus Aurelius* (that I may return to my matter) negligent as to the particular. But he, observing, as *Antoninus* had the Earth-quakes, that in an expedition against the *Germans* and *Sarmatians*, his Army being in despair almost for want of water, the *Melusine* (afterwards from the event called the *Thundring*) Legion, which consisted of Christians, kneel'd down in the very heat of their thirst and fight, praying for rain; which posture the Enemies wondring at, immediately there brake out such a thundring and lightning, as together with the Christian valour, routed the adverse Army, but so much rain fell therewith, as refreshed *Aurelius* his Forces, that were at the last gasp for thirst: He thence forward commanded by his Letters, *That upon pain of death none should inform against the Christians*, as *Tertullian* in his Apology for the Christians witnesses. But who would have believed that even *Commodus*, so great a Tyrant otherwise, should have been so favourable as to make a Law, *That the Informers against Christians should be punished with death*? Yet he did, and the Informer against *Apollonius* was by it executed. Much less could a man have thought that, that prodigy of cruelty *Maximine*, and who exercised it so severely upon the Christians, should, as he did, being struck with God's hand, publish when it was too late Edict after Edict, in great favour of the Christians. But above all, nothing could have been less expected than that, after those Heathen Emperors, the first Christian *Constantine* should have been seduced by the Bishops, to be after them, the first occasion of Persecution, so contrary to his own excellent inclination: 'Twas then that he spake his own mind, when he said, *Eus. de vitâ Const. 69.* You ought to retain within the bounds of your private thoughts of those things, which you cunningly and subtly seek out concerning most frivolous questions. And then much plainer, c. 67. where he saith so wisely. You are not ignorant that the Philosophers all of them do agree in the profession of the same Discipline, but do oftentimes differ in some part of the Opinions that they dogmatize in: But yet, although they do dissent about the Discipline that each several Sect observeth, they nevertheless reconcile themselves again for the sake of that common Profession to which they have concurred. But again compulsion in Religious matters so much every where, that it is needless to insert one passage. And he being of this disposition, and universally famous for his care and countenance of the Christian Religion. *Eusebius* saith these words, *While the People of God did glory and heighten it self in the doing of good things, and all fear from without was taken away, and the Church was fortifi'd as I may say, on all sides by a peaceable and illustrious tranquility, then Envy lying in wait against our prosperity, craftily crept in, and began first to dance in the midst of the company of Bishops; so goes on, telling the History of Alexander and Arrius.* I have been before large enough in that relation, wherein appeared that, contrary to that great Emperours pious intention, whereas *Envy began to dance among the*

Bishops first, the good *Constantine* brought them the Fiddles. But it appear'd likewise how soon he was weary of the Ball, and toward his latter end, as Princes often do upon too late experience, would have repress'd all, and returned to his natural temper. Of the other Christian Emperours I likewise discours'd, omitting, that I might insert it in this place, how the great Heathen Philosopher *Themistius*, in his Consolar Oration, celebrated *Jovianus* for having given that toleration in Christian Religion, and thereby defeated the flattering Bishops, which sort of men, saith he wittily, do not worship God, but the Imperial Purple.

It was the same *Themistius*, that only out of an upright natural apprehension of things, made that excellent Oration afterward to *Valens*, which is in Print, exhorting him to cease Persecution ; wherein he chances upon, and improves the same notion with *Constantines*, and tells him, *That he should not wonder at the Dissents in Christian Religion, which were very small if compared with the multitude and crowd of Opinions among the Gentile Philosophers ; for there were at least three hundred differences, and a very great dissention among them there was about their resolutions, unto which each several Sect was as it were, necessarily bound up and obliged : And that God seem'd to intend more to illustrate his own glory by that diverse and unequal variety of Opinions, to the end every each one might therefore so much the more reverence his Divine Majesty, because it is not possible for any one accurately to know him.* And this had a good effect upon *Valens*, for the mitigating in some measure his severities against his fellow Christians. So that after having cast about in this Summery again, (whereby it plainly appears, that according to natural right, and the apprehension of all sober Heathen Governors, Christianity as a Religion, was wholly exempt from the Magistrates jurisdiction or Laws, farther than any particular person among them immorally transgressed, as others, the common rules of human society) I cannot but return to the Question with which I begun. What was the matter ? How came it about that Christianity, which approved it self under all Persecutions to the Heathen Emperours, and merited their favour so far, till at last it regularly succeeded to the Monarchy, should under those of their own profession, be more distressed ? But the Answer is now much shorter and certainer, and I will adventure boldly to say, the true and single cause then was the Bishops. And they were the cause against reason. For what power had the Emperours by growing Christians, more than those had before them ? None. What obligation were Christians Subject under to the Magistrate more than before ? None. But the Magistrates Christian Authority was what the Apostle describ'd it while Heathen ; *not to be a terror to good works, but to evil.* What new Power had the Bishops acquired, whereby they turned every Pontificate into a *Caiaphat* ? None neither, 2 Cor. 10. 8. Had they been Apostles. *The Lord had but given them Authority for edification, not for destruction.* They, of all other, ought to have Preached to the Magistrate the terrible denunciations in Scripture against usurping upon, and persecuting of Christians. They, of all others, ought to have laid before them the horrible Examples of God's ordi-

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nary Justice against those that exercised Persecution. But, provided they could be the Swearers of the Prince, to do all due Allegiance to the Church, and to preserve the Rights and Liberties of the Church, however they came by them, they would give them as much scope as he pleased, in matter of Christianity, and would be the first to sollicite him to break the Laws of *Christ*, and ply him with hot places of Scripture, in order to all manner of Oppression and Persecution in Civils and Spirituals. So that the whole business how this unchristian Tyranny came, and could entitle it self among Christians, against the Christian priviledges, was only the case in *Zech. 13. 6. 7. And one shall say unto him, What are these wounds in thy hands? Then he shall answer, those with which I was wounded in the house of my Friends.* Because they were all Christians, they thought forsooth they might make the bolder with them, make bolder with *Christ*, and wound him again in the hands and feet of his members. Because they were Friends, they might use them more coarsly, and abuse them against all common civility, in their own house, which is a Protection to Strangers. And all this to the end that a Bishop might sit with the Prince in *Junio*, to consult wisely how to preserve him from those people that never meant him any harm, and to secure him from the Sedition and Rebellion of men that seek, nor think any thing more, but to follow their own Religious Christian Worship. It was indeed as ridiculous a thing to the Pagans to see that work, as it was afterwards in *England* to Strangers, where Papists and Protestants went both to wrack at the same instant, in the same Market; and when *Erasmus* said wittily, *Quid agitur in Angliâ? (Consultitur, he might have added, though not so elegantly, Comburitur) de Religione.* Because they knew that Christian Worship was free by *Christ's* Institution, they procured the Magistrate to make Laws in it concerning things necessary: As the Heathen Persecutor *Julian* introduced some bordering Pagan Ceremonies, and arguing with themselves in the same manner, as he did, *Soz. 1. 5. c. 16. That if Christians should obey those Laws, they should be able to bring them about to something further, which they had designed. But if they would not, then they might proceed against them without any hope of pardon, as breakers of the Laws of the Empire, and represent them as turbulent and dangerous to the Government.* Indeed, whatsoever the Animadverter saith of the Act of Seditious Conventicles here in *England*, as if it were Anvill'd after another of the *Roman* Senate; the Christians of those Ages had all the finest tools of Persecution out of *Julian's* Shop, and studied him then as curiously as some do now *Machiavel*. These Bishops it was, who, because the Rule of *Christ* was incomparable with the Power that they assumed, and the Vices they practised, had no way to render themselves necessary or tolerable to Princes, but by making true Piety difficult, by Innovating Laws to revenge themselves upon it, and by turning Make-bates between Prince and People, instilling dangers of which themselves were the Authors. Hence it is, that having awakened this Jealousie once in the Magistrate, against Religion, they made both the Secular and the Ecclesiastical Government so uneasy to him, that most Princes began to look upon their Sub-

jects as their Enemies, and to imagine a reason of State different from the Interest of their People; and therefore to weaken themselves by seeking unnecessary and grievous supports to their Authority. Whereas if men could have refrain'd this cunning, and from thence forcible governing of Christianity, leaving it to its own simplicity and due liberty, but causing them in all other things to keep the Kings and Christs peace among themselves, and towards others, all the ill that could have come of it, would have been, that such kind of Bishops should have prov'd less implemental; but the good that must have thence risen to the Christian Magistrate and the Church, then and ever after, would have been inexpressible.

But this discourse having run in a manner wholly upon the Imposition of Creeds, may seem not to concern (and I desire that it may not reflect upon) our Clergy, nor the Controversies which have so unhappily vex'd our Church ever since the reign of Edward the Sixth unto this day. Only, if there might be something pick'd out of it towards the Compromising of those differences (which I have not from any performance of mine, the vanity to imagine) it may have use as an Argument, a *Majori ad Minus*, their disputes having risen only from that of Creeds, ours from the Imposition only of Ceremonies, which are of much inferior consideration. Faith being necessary, but Ceremonies Dispensable. Unless our Church should lay the same weight upon them, as one did. *This is the time of her settlement, that there is a Church at the end of every Mile, that the Sovereign Powers spread their wings to cover and protect her, that Kings and Queens are her Nursing Fathers and Nursing Mothers, that she hath stately Cathedrals; there be so many arguments now to make Ceremonies Necessary, which may all be answered with one Question that they use to ask Children: Where are you proud?* But I should rather hope from the Wisdom and Christianity of the present guides of our Church, that they will (after an age and more, after so long a time almost as those Primitive Bishops I have spoke of, yet suffered the Novatian Bishops in every Diocess) have mercy on the Nation that hath been upon so slender a matter as the Ceremonies and Liturgy so long, so miserably harass'd. That they will have mercy upon the King, whom they know against his natural inclination, his Royal Intention, his many Declarations, they have induced to more Severities then all the reigns since the Conquest will contain, if summ'd up together; who may, as Constantine among his Private Devotions put up one Collect to the Bishops, *Euseb. de vitâ Const. 7. 70. Date igitur mihi Dies tranquillios & Noctes cararum experies.* And it runs thus almost altogether verbatim in that Historian. *Grant, most merciful Bishop and Priest that I may have calm days, and nights free from care and molestation, that I may live a peaceable life in all Godliness and Holiness for the future by your good agreement; which unless you vouchsafe me, I shall waste away my Reign in perpetual sadness and vexation. For as long as the People of God stands divided by so unjust and pernicious a Contention, how can it be that I can have any ease in my own Spirit. Open therefore by your good agreement the way to me, that I may continue my Expedition towards the East; and grant that I may see both*  
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you and all the rest of my People, having laid aside your animosities, rejoicing together, that we may all with one voice give laud and glory, for the common and good agreement and liberty, to God Almighty for ever, Amen. But if neither the People nor his Majesty enter into their consideration. I hope it is no unreasonable request that they will be merciful unto themselves, and have some reverence at least for the *Naked Truth* of History, which either in their own times will meet with them, or in the next Age overtake them: That they, who are some of them so old, that as Confessors, they were the Scars of the former troubles, others of them so young, that they are free from all the Motives of Revenge and hatred, should yet joyn in reviving the former persecutions upon the same pretences; yea, even themselves in a turbulent, military, and uncanonical manner execute Laws of their own procuring, and depute their inferior Clergy to be the Informers. I should rather hope to see not only that Controversie so scandalous abolished, but that also upon so good an occasion as the Author of the *Naked Truth* hath administered them, they will inspect their Clergy, and cause many things to be corrected, which are far more ruinous in the Consequence than the dispensing with a Surplice. I shall mention some too confusedly, as they occur to my Pen, at present, reserving much more for better leisure. Methinks it might be of great edification, that those of them, who have ample possessions, should be in a good sense, *Multas inter opes inopes*. That they would inspect the Canons of the ancient Councils, where are many excellent ones for the regulation of the Clergy. I saw one, looking but among those of the same Council of *Nice*, against any Bishops removing from a less Bishoprick to a greater, nor that any of the inferior Clergy should leave a less living for a fatter. That is methinks the most Natural use of General, or any Councils to make Canons, as it were By-laws for the ordering of their own Society; but they ought not to take out, much less forge any Patent to invade and prejudice the Community. It were good that the greater Church-men relied more upon themselves, and their own direction, not building too much upon Stripling Chaplains, that men may not suppose the Master (as one that has a good Horse, or a fleet Hound) attributes to himself the virtues of his Creature. That they inspect the Morals of the Clergy; the Moral Hereticks do the Church more harm than all the Non-conformists can do, or can wish it. That before they admit men to subscribe the Thirty-nine Articles for a Benefice, they try whether they know the meaning. That they would much recommend to them the reading of the Bible. 'Tis a very good Book, and if a man read it carefully, will make him much wiser. That they would advise them to keep the Sabbath: If there were no Morality in the day, yet there is a great deal of Prudence in the observing it. That they would instruct those that come for Holy Orders and Livings, that it is a terrible Vocation they enter upon; but that has indeed the greatest reward. That to gain a Soul is beyond all the acquits of Traffick, and to Convert an Atheist, more glorious than all the Conquests of the Souldier. That betaking themselves to this Spiritual Warfare, they ought to disintangle from the World. That they do

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not ride for a Benefice, as if it were for a Fortune, or a Mistress; but there is more in it. That they take the Ministry up not as a Trade. That they make them understand as well as they can, what is the grace of God. That they do not come into the Pulpit too full of Fustian or Logick; a good life is a Clergy-mans best Syllogism, and the quaintest Oratory; and till they out-live 'em, they will never get the better of the Fanaticks, nor be able to Preach with Demonstration of Spirit, or with any effect or Authority. That they be lowly minded, and no Railers.

But these things require a greater Time, and to enumerate all that is amiss, might perhaps be as endless as to number the People; nor are they within the ordinary Sphere of my Capacity.

But to the Judicious and Serious Reader, to whom I wish any thing I have said, may have given no unwelcome entertainment; I shall only so far justify my self, that I thought it no less concerned me to vindicate the Laity from the Impositions that the *Few* would force upon them, than others to defend those Impositions on behalf of the Clergy. But the Reverend Mr. Hooker in his *Ecclesiastical Polity*, says, *The time will come when three words, uttered with Charity and Meekness, shall receive a far more blessed reward, than three thousand Volumes written with disdainful sharpness of Wit.* And I shall conclude.

*I trust in the Almighty, that with us, Contentions are now at the highest float, and that the day will come (for what cause is there of Despair) when the Passions of former enmity being allaid, men shall with ten times redoubled tokens of unfaindly reconciled Love, shew themselves each to other the same which Joseph, and the Brethren of Joseph were at the time of their Enterview in Egypt. And upon this condition, let my Book also (yea, my self if it were needful) be burnt by the hand of those Enemies to the Peace and Tranquility of the Religion of England.*

FINIS.

